



**King County**

**Ron Sims**

King County Executive

**King County Charter Review Commission**

**Public Hearing Summary – June 20, 2007**

The Hall at Fauntleroy, 6:30pm-8:00pm

The 2007-2008 Charter Review Commission held its fifth of nine public hearings on Wednesday June 20, 2007 at the Hall at Fauntleroy. The purpose of the meetings is to gather input from the public on how the county charter should be amended.

Commissioner Sharon Maeda chaired the meeting. Other commissioners in attendance were Allan Munro, Gary Long, Jim English, John Jensen, and Tara Jo Heinecke. Councilmember Dow Constantine was present.

Ms. Maeda gave opening remarks and introduced the commissioners.

Councilmember Constantine also gave a brief introduction and then Ms. Cato opened the floor for citizen comments. Eight people provided remarks.

**Summary of Issues:**

Partisan Council (1 comment):

- Retain Partisan Council (1 person)

Electing the Elections Director (1 comment):

- Preferred appointed (1 person)

Electing the Auditor (1 comment):

- Preferred appointed (1 person)

Campaign Finance Reform (2 comments):

- In favor of it (Public Campaign Financing) (2 person)

Instant Runoff Voting (4 comments):

- Against IRV (1 person)
- For IRV (3 people)

Unincorporated Area Council (1 comment):

- Clarification of UAC role (1 person)

Electing the Sheriff (3 comment):

- Preferred elected (3 person)

- No opinion (1 person)

Paid Signature Gathering (2 comment)

- Prohibit the use of paid signature gatherers (2 people)

Election Reform (1 comment)

- Favors an at-large system (1 person)

Sustainability (1 comment)

- In favor of a charter amendment that focuses on economic, ecological, and social sustainability (1 person)

Number of King County Councilmembers (1 comment)

- Increase County Council from 9 back to 13

### **Summary of Comments by Name:**

Ivan Weiss, of Vashon Island:

- Favors a partisan council. He feels that the party system works well because it allows the people to vet the candidates and know them.
- Does not believe the elections director should be elected. It should be appointed.
- He also believes the Auditor should remain appointed
- He is in favor of campaign finance reform
- He doesn't have an opinion on Appt/Electing the Sheriff as well as paid signature gathering
- Instant Runoff voting should be defeated. He mentioned that there are significant problems with Pierce County. It is meant to cut into the partisan primary which is required by law.

Commissioner Munro asked a question in regards to electing a sheriff – If the Sheriff is elected wouldn't they be beholden to their campaign contributors?

Mr. Weiss replied that he would be fine either way.

Janet Anderson, of West Seattle, Citizens for Proportional Representation:

- King County should enact a more fair elections system; research and investigation is needed by the county. British Columbia changed to a proportional system and New Zealand follows Instant Runoff Voting procedures
- Council candidates should run at-large.

Mark Ufkes, of White Center:

- He believes that the UAC elections are very small and that they do not represent the areas well. There should be a clarification of roles and UAC's should not be making policies
- He does not believe we should elect the Sheriff.

Claire Hanson, of Boulevard Park

- Doesn't believe the UAC's should be listed as a government – She doesn't share their view on annexation

- The notification for this meeting was not adequate. Staff needs to do a better job of outreach
- Is firmly against paid signature gatherers – ACORN pressured many people to join
- King County needs to do a better job at representing Boulevard Park

Good Spaceguy Nelson, of West Seattle

- A candidate for County Council is unhappy with the process – He thinks the arrangement of the elections process forces you to run against people in your district only
- A system where candidates were to run at-large is much more preferred
- We need to create a category of helper citizens which would reduce the significant unemployment rate in Washington State
- Would like to see a system of preference/ranked/choice voting – Voters should be able to vote for their first choice. No wasted votes – allows voters to express what they want

Liz Giba, of West Seattle

- Concerns about annexation – no contested seats for UAC in last election – Only volunteer in the area, more outreach needs to occur in these areas
- Also believes there should not be paid signature gatherers
- In favor of an elected sheriff

Lindsey Nussbaum, of Delridge

- Strong supporter of Instant Runoff Voting
- Favors public campaign financing – who are elected officials beholden to
- Sustainability – Would like to see a charter amendment that promote economic, ecological, and social sustainability – Let's institutionalize sustainability

Jean Durbin, of West Seattle – Former wastewater division employee

- In favor of an Elected Sheriff – would like to see Citizen's Committee to oversee wrongdoing
- Perhaps switching the number of Councilmembers from 9 back to 13 – It's harder to get distinct local connection
- Would like to see the utilities protected from politics – Wastewater and solid waste are now a cash cow, but there is plant staff cutbacks

From here a discussion commenced and Mr. Munro asked Janet Anderson a question of a winner take all form of election, suggesting that Council run at-large

Ms. Anderson replied that's a common misconception. Minorities are represented countywide. It would be easy to demonstrate.

Councilmember Constantine who is the individual that would be elected? Does a party win?

Ms. Anderson suggested that minority representation doesn't need to be a party.

Ms. Henson asked if there was a motion in the council to go back to a 13 member Council.

Councilmember Constantine replied that there is not. It's theoretical.

Mr. Munro proceeded to ask if King County provided adequate services to unincorporated areas.

Ms. Henson replied that the unincorporated areas are underrepresented. There is not enough outreach. She said that the UAC's destroyed their community councils. There needs to be more outreach to Boulevard Park.

Mr. Jensen then asked the question of elected vs. appointed Sheriff. There was 1 citizen for, 1 against, and 1 didn't care.

Mr. Nussbaum replied that people may rethink their positions after their experiences.

Councilmember Constantine pointed out that our system in the US is winner take all. It exaggerates the victory but frustrates the minority.

Ms. Anderson replied that the unincorporated areas got broached. You can't deal with a sizable population that feels poorly represented.

Councilmember Constantine replied that the Unincorporated areas are very different.

Ms. Durbin asked if the charter provides for an audit.

Councilmember Constantine replied no. The County auditor is responsible to be assigned investigations by the Council.

Ms. Durbin suggested that there are many expensive projects that are wasteful. The County needs to be more accountable.

Mr. Long made the remark that the County is departmentally focused.

Ms. Henson asked how we can resolve to change things.

Mr. Long replied to pressure the Executive.

Ms. Heinecke mentioned that as a former union representative, the Sheriff's office seems to be a popularity contest. It doesn't necessarily select the person with the best skills which is very risky.

Mr. Jensen pointed out that we need a balance between confidence/accountability and technical skills.